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EXPLORING VODCASTS AS SUPPORTIVE LEARNING TOOL TO ENHANCE OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING AT UNDERGRADUATE TERTIARY LEVEL

ABSTRACT

Open and distance learning witnessed a paradigm shift, especially in communication science which is an inherently innovative discipline, to inventive advances designed to facilitate the parallel distance education streams. Virtual learning became a key component to enhance the effectiveness of online learning systems in the 21st century. Vodcasts, a relative new technology and novel medium used worldwide to enhance information transfer and allow students to download and transfer it to their own electronic devices, have demonstrated to be one such learning method. It is argued that vodcasts can be used as a resource to challenge comprehensive learning objectives, to supplement the fundamental delivery of content and curriculum and to improve the learning of students. Various studies indicated that the open and distance learning based approach should be reformed to an integrative approach with increased emphasis on student-centeredness and self-learning. To explore this, the aim of this article is to conduct a comprehensive study that investigates the use and perceptions of undergraduate communication science students on vodcasts available for download from the communication science module web site to enhance their learning. Twenty-four module-related vodcasts were accessed within an interpretivistic paradigm based on thematic categories derived from Monge's (1999) three notable influences of globalisation on communication, namely: time and space compression; global consciousness and reflexivity; and disembeddedness in single locations. This analysis was supplemented with the perceptions of the students to the newly introduced medium and perceived benefits.

KEY WORDS

Podcasts; Vodcasts; e-Learning; disembeddedness; time-space compression; global consciousness and reflexivity; Organisational communication globalisation; notable influences of globalisation.

INTRODUCTION

Open and distance learning (ODL) is a two tiered concept which includes and relates the concepts open education and distance learning. Open education, when considered independently, can imply a great number of aspects and include many characteristics, but in its simplest form inherently demands that no entry requirements be set for students (excepting very broad ones for example age) whilst students have the freedom to study anywhere and at a time chosen by themselves (mostly within a specified broader timeframe, for example in semester or year format) (Kember 2007, 7; Simpson 2002, 2). Distance learning on the other hand quite simply, as the name suggests, implies learning and education where a “separation of learners and teachers in real space” exists (Evans, Haughey and Murphy 2008, 2).

The University of South Africa (Unisa), which is the largest open and distance university on the African continent, and which “justly claims to be the only truly national university” (Unisa 2005, 2), defines open distance learning, in its specified niche to be:

“a multi-dimensional concept aimed at bridging the time, geographical, economic, social educational and communication distance between student and institution, student and academics, student and courseware and student and peers. Open distance learning focuses on removing barriers to access learning, flexibility of learning provision, student-centredness, supporting students and constructing learning programmes with the expectation that students can succeed” (Unisa 2008, 2).

From this definition it can be deduced that open and distance learning necessarily includes an educational environment where students are removed from the institution and other students in physical space and where students have the freedom to study anywhere and at a time that they themselves specify.

Unisa, as context to open and distance learning, is “aimed at bridging the time ... and communication distance” (Unisa 2008, 2) that inherently forms part of an ODL environment. Alongside this, the institution is striving towards being a “fifth generation ODL institution”, which necessarily includes the usage of technologies such as the “Internet and WWW – the sharing of resources, asynchronous & synchronous communication, integration of media and technology for multiple platforms... plus open educational resources, self publishing, Web2.0 and beyond.” (Prinsloo 2011).

In the field of Organisational Communication, a possible means for using these technologies for the bridging these facets of an ODL environment is specifically found in the work of Monge and Matei (2004), Monge (1999); (1998), Monge, Fulk, Flanagan, Parnassa and Rumsey (1998) and Monge and Kalman (1996) where three notable influences of globalisation and accompanying communication technologies are identified. These three influences are the compression of time and space, global consciousness and reflexivity as well as disembeddedness in single locations – all factors that Unisa sets out and pledges to address, by means of e-learning and technological applications.

Theoretically, according to these three notable influences of globalisation, new technologies such as vodcasts can be used in an institution such as Unisa to compress the time and space distances between the students and the University, to instil a sense of global consciousness and reflexivity; and to promote disembeddedness in a single location. In essence this will contribute to bridging the distances Unisa aims to.

This article therefore explores this theoretical assumption by empirically testing it at Unisa through a case study approach and in a real life context. Vodcasts provided to second year Communication Science students will be evaluated in terms of the three notable influences, specifically in terms of the theoretical criteria as well as influences to see whether or not they perceive the distance to be bridged.

In order to do this, an in depth understanding of the literature in which these assumptions are proposed will be gained in the next section.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since it was understood that electromagnetic waves make signals and eventually broadcasts possible, technology has been employed for the purpose of communication. From the time of this discovery in the 1860's communication technologies have progressed rapidly and this progress was propelled by the commercial and personal use of the Internet (Petrie 2009, 6; Leiner, Cerf, Clark, Khan, Kleinrock, Lynch, Postel, Roberts and Wolff 2009, 23). New technologies today thrive on connectivity which has at its core communication and broadcasting. It is from this stance of connectivity that technologies and applications for podcasting and eventually vodcasting developed.

Vodcasting

Vodcasts are a continuation and progression from podcasts, the latter being described by Rectham and Zhang (2006, 314) as audio content on the Internet, which can be downloaded to a personal computer or any other MP3 enabled device and by King and Gura (2005, 8) as “a series of portable sound files, hosted on the web and distributed”. Vodcasts differ from podcasts in the fact that they are not only audio in nature, but hold a visual component as well. Vodcasts by nature are therefore a series of **audio-visual** files hosted on the Internet, which can be downloaded to a personal computer or any other video-enabled connected device.

This video quality allows an educator to, for example, pre-record a series of lessons or lectures and distribute it to students via the Internet. Needless to say, this application of vodcasts hold virtually limitless possibilities for teaching and learning (see for example Vogt, Schaffner, Ribar and Chavez (2010); Frydenberg (2008); Edirisingha and Salmon (2007) and Edirisingha, Salmon and Fothergill (2007)) and although these are related aspects to this article, it is not the focus thereof as it rather focuses on the use of educational vodcasts to bridge distances created by the ODL environment, taking into consideration, of course, the educational value thereof.

To understand the way in which it is proposed that new technologies such as vodcasts are able to address problems of distance in the ODL environment, the three notable influences of globalisation as described by Monge and Matei (2004), Monge (1999); (1998), Monge et al (1998) and Monge and Kalman (1996) are explored, as theoretically for the purposes of this study.

The notable influences of globalisation

Globalisation is a concept that holds many different definitions and implications, mostly depending on the vantage point of the definer. At the core of this concept is the fact that a globalised world is one ‘single place’, meaning that globalisation permits interactions to such a nature that distant aspects become localised and vice versa. At the centre of making these interactions possible is new technologies, mostly distributed by means of the Internet and the World Wide Web (Pieterse 2009, vii; Dreher, Gaston and Martens 2008, 1; Held and McGrew 2007, 2).

Monge (1999) and Monge and Matei (2004) relate the ‘single place’ phenomena and interactions to the field of Organisational Communications, and in doing so look at the influence of globalisation on communications, and in its turn the influence of communications on globalisation. They define the three

notable influences as previously mentioned, namely the compression of time and space; global consciousness and reflexivity; as well as disembeddedness in single locations.

Compression of time and space

Time and space are historically aspects by which physical being could be measured – for example where and when an event happened, or person lived, et cetera. This physical or “real” presence of time and space has in most facets of its understanding been completely re-devised and transformed mindful of the globalised world. Through new communication technologies interaction has changed to such an extent that “time has been separated from space and both have been dramatically compressed” (Monge 1999, 144). This is due to the fact that new technologies make it possible for individuals, who are removed from one another in physical space and time, to communicate as if they are in one single location.

One example that encounters this compression of time and space is social networking for example through the Facebook site. On this site, members share their lives and interactions with a group of friends who neither has to be in the same physical space as them, nor in the same time. Consider the fact that Facebook users share their personal photographs with friends over this platform. In the past (without this new technology) the individual would have to show photographs to a friend by making sure that the friend is in the same physical place (space) as the photographs, at the same time. Now, by means of this new communication technology, neither friend has to be in the same space as the other, or the (previously) single copies of the photographs and each friend is also able to view and comment on the photographs at different times (one friend might view and comment on the photographs on a Monday, whilst a next friend does so on a Tuesday and yet another can comment on the comments of the previous two on the Wednesday). Simply put, the communication is not dependant on the communicators being in the same space or time, in order for it to take place.

For a university like Unisa, that functions in an ODL environment, this theoretically equates to the fact that interaction, irrespective of time and space, is now possible by means of these new technologies. It is therefore assumed that students will perceive interactions with others regardless of the others’ physical space and the time that they choose to interact in. The compression of space thus speaks to the dimension of distance, whilst time compression speaks to that of openness (which implies that students should be able to study at a time of their choosing – see the introduction section of the article).

Global consciousness and reflexivity

New technologies allow for the formation of communities of individuals that sees communications and interactions between individuals from all across the world. This process helps to create participation in a worldwide communication process that gives rise to global consciousness for all who participate. It is therefore argued that communication plays a central role in “creating global consciousness and in the reflexive process of creating and recreating human community” due to the fact that “knowledge of the world is increasingly stored in knowledge repositories that are accessed via communication networks” (Monge 1999, 145). This human communality is defined as the ability of individuals or groups to share and store information interchangeably and with the rise of the globalisation of new communication technologies the means has been provided for the sharing of images, sounds, ideas, knowledge and the like across the globe. Individuals that are affected by this phenomenon start to think of local issues they face as global and global issues that they are affronted with as a kin to local.

If the example used earlier about the sharing of photographs on the social networking site Facebook is applied to global consciousness and reflexivity; Facebook friends might not live in the same country or on the same continent, but each friend shares in, and exposes the other to their country and continent by means of images, sounds, ideas and the like, as discussed above. It is in this instance that each individual partaking in this interaction is able to relate their own personal (local) experiences to those ‘global’ experiences exposed to via the social networking site, the same way that floods in Brisbane Australia in 2011, is described as an “inland tsunami”, referring to happenings in the Indian ocean in 2004. The relation of localised issues in terms of a global understanding is therefore evident – an aspect that is only possible to this extent through exposure by means of communication technologies in the globalised arena.

In the Unisa context, this would mean that course content relating to global as well as local issues could potentially be shared by means of new media technology to students, which will allow students to equate local aspects to global and vice versa. In a singular instance, for example, students would be able to experience different understandings or ideas relating to specific contents – from international understandings to local understandings.

Disembeddedness in single locations

The last influence of globalisation on communication relates the two previously discussed influences to one another and is identified as “the ‘lifting out’ of human interactions from the local contexts and restructuring them across time and space” (Monge 1999, 146). This aspect is seen to be important, as it aids in the reconnection of individuals at a distance by distributing knowledge through the diffusion of information between them, which increases their knowledge level. As these interactions and the sharing of knowledge is restructured “across time and space”, none of the physical locations that the participating individuals find themselves in can be deemed as important, as none are significant. Resultantly, and drawing from the first influence discussed, the physical locations that the respective individuals find themselves in become obsolete, as a new location or space is created – albeit not a physical space – a space existing through interaction via new media communication technology.

Again, when an individual from China is *chatting* with an individual from Africa over the social networking site Facebook, their physical location no longer matters as they are “lifted out” from these locations and can freely and synchronously communicate via this networking site. This site then becomes the new space created by the interaction between these individuals, and the fact that they are on two different continents no longer matters. In the context of Unisa, if students are taught by means of e-learning technologies on the Internet, for example, a classroom theoretically becomes obsolete, as the students do not need to be in this single location in order to interact with the lecturer and the content – the e-learning site becomes the new classroom. This again theoretically aids in bridging the distance between the student and the lecturer, other students as well as the contents being studied.

This aspect flows into the next part of the literature review, which deals with the context of Unisa as case study.

Vodcasts, influences of globalisation and Unisa

As stated in the introduction, Unisa is the largest open and distance university on the African continent and is aimed at bridging the inherent and resultant distances of ODL, specifically the distance created between students and the institution (Unisa 2008, 2; Unisa 2005, 2). In the previous section of this literature review, literature of Organisational Communication and globalisation was discussed which theoretically gives an aiding solution to bridging these distances by means of new communication technologies – for example the Internet and accompanying sites and applications. One of the first observations that can be made in this instance is that not all (arguably not even most) students at this

institution have access to the Internet and to the applications and sites needed to see the influences of globalisation affect them. Although this is a very valid observation and inference, the aim of this article is not to generally equate the use of new technology at Unisa to the bridging of distances to the entire student population, but rather to explore to what degree new technologies employed (and therein vodcasts specifically) fulfil the theoretical assumptions of the notable influences of globalisation empirically for Communication Science students who actually do have access to this new technology.

At Unisa, an online platform is used for the diffusion of information and knowledge, known as *myUnisa*. This platform allows students to interact online with lecturers, other students and the content of the course, online. Each student logs into the site with their student number and they are then given access to individual course sites (those that they are registered for) whereon lecturers load content specific to each module, for the students to download. This platform boasts various applications (including space for discussion forums, wiki's, blogs etc.) but for the purposes of this article, attention will be given to the function that allows lecturers to share vodcasts (for the purpose of learning) to all students that register and access this site for a specific module offered.

For the module Organisational Communication in the Department of Communication Science, twenty five vodcasts were created and uploaded on the *myUnisa* site for students to download. These vodcasts cover the entire module contents, by structuring it in a format resembling lessons (corresponding to the study guide of the module), wherein the content is explained by means of a PowerPoint presentation that is accompanied by the primary lecturer for the module's voice. In much the same way as that a residential university lecturer would explain the contents of a module aided by a PowerPoint presentation, so too does the vodcasts offer the students one consecutive lesson at a time – only in electronic format.

Allowing the students a semester to interact with these vodcasts, research can be done into the perceptions of these students regarding the ability of this medium to bridge the distances inherent to the ODL environment – theoretically assumed to be possible. Before this is done, however, the equation of these vodcasts to the principles upheld in literature regarding its assumed influences will be done. The next section therefore explains the research method to be used for this research.

RESEARCH METHOD

The empirical part of this research utilises methodological triangulation as it employs both qualitative as well as quantitative methods (Keyton 2006, 65; Olsen 2004; Decrop 1999, 157). The qualitative part of

the study focuses on evaluating the vodcasts used for the module Organisational Communication against the theoretical statements made in the literature, specifically with regards to the three notable influences of globalisation.

In this part of the research, the theoretical statements of each one of the three notable influences of globalisation will be weighed and discussed alongside the Organisational Communication vodcasts, with those aspects that conflict and concur with the statements made, highlighted. This will allow for an inference to be made, which will see the vodcasts being accepted as a medium theoretically able to act as a new communication technology capable of the influences suggested in literature, and thus theoretically capable in aiding to bridge the distances of an ODL environment, or not.

The second part of the research is quantitative in nature and examines the perceptions of students at its core. For this part of the study, a quantitative self-administered questionnaire survey was employed. The questions and items of the questionnaire were categorised in two sections. The first section dealt with demographical aspects of the students (asking about age, gender, how many years have they been a student etc.) whilst the second section included questions dealing with the three notable influences of globalisation. For this section, a Likert scale was employed to measure the students' perceptions, asking them to what degree they find statements to be true or not (generally true to generally not true). The statements themselves were derived from literature, as the basic principles of each one of the three notable influences were made into questions and items. Four items per influence was asked, allowing for an equivalent form approach, which improved the reliability and validity of the questionnaire items (Goddard and Melville 2001, 87).

As the vodcasts for Organisational Communication were only available on the *myUnisa* site at this time (the first semester of 2010), all students registered on *myUnisa* for this module at this time, were targeted and sampled for this research. For this semester in 2010, 1620 students registered for this module, of which 697 were registered users on *myUnisa*. This means that 697 students had access to the vodcasts directly. At the end of the semester (when the examinations were done), the questionnaire (in electronic format) was sent out to all of the students who were registered users on this site. This means that all of the students who had access to the vodcasts were sampled for the research – all had an equal and known chance to take part therein, if they so wished. Despite this fact, or perhaps as a result of the timing thereof, a low response rate for the questionnaires was experienced. A total of 30 completed questionnaires were returned, making the response rate 4.305%. Nevertheless, the data from the

questionnaires were analysed by means of the statistical software programme SPSS. The next section will deal with the findings from this questionnaire, as well as the evaluation of the vodcasts themselves.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Qualitative research findings

In order to see whether or not the vodcasts used for the module Organisational Communication (module code COM2025) can be classified as a medium theoretically capable of helping to bridge the gaps of an ODL environment, it will have to be accessed alongside the notable influences of globalisation as discussed in the literature review section. If the vodcasts of this module can emit these influences, the theory in this regard states that it is indeed possible to help bridge some of the gaps of ODL. Each of the three notable influences will now be discussed to this end, considering the COM2025 vodcasts' applicability.

Compression of time and space

As mentioned above, through new communication technologies interaction has changed to such an extent that "time has been separated from space and both have been dramatically compressed" (Monge 1999, 144). This is due to the fact that new technologies make it possible for individuals, who are removed from one another in physical space and time, to communicate as if they are in one single location.

The COM2025 vodcasts as a new communication medium allows the lecturer to 'lecture' students across a distance (both in time and space). This means that this new communication technology allows students to access lectures without having to be in a lecture hall at the University, at a specific time. The students can access the vodcasts from anywhere in the world, and watch it at any time that they wish. In this sense, time and space is compressed.

Having said this, however, reciprocal communication is not possible (though this medium alone) as students cannot send messages **back** to the lecturers via the vodcasts. This means that the communication between the lecturer and students is only one-way; directed to the students. In this it is seen that the vodcasts for COM2025 only partially fulfils this influence, as the ODL obstacle of time and space is compressed, but not completely traversed.

Global consciousness and reflexivity

This influence denotes that, as a result of interaction and sharing via new communication technologies, individuals start to think of local issues that they face as global and global issues that they are affronted with as a kin to local. This process helps to create participation in international as well as local issues (for example through images) that give raise to global consciousness for all who participate.

The COM2025 vodcasts present students with knowledge that is both locally as well as internationally (globally) generated, and presents it in such a way as to not make a distinction between the two. Giving a specific example, the vodcast that deals with the systems and contingency theories gives examples that are both globally as well as locally generated. In figure 1 below, it can be seen that examples ranging from international women's rights marches, to global warming, technological innovations to the HIV/Aids pandemic and the 2010 soccer world cup hosted in South Africa was discussed – all without the distinction between what is local and global. The point is thus that students are taught (auditory as well as through visualisations) that all of these aspects impact on Organisational Communications – whether it be international or local issues.

> Insert Figure 1 here <

In this same way images from international as well as local aspects are used as examples throughout the range of vodcasts – of which an example is seen in Figure 2 where culture is discussed. Here, not only images of local cultures are depicted, but also international cultures.

> Insert Figure 2 here <

It can therefore be inferred that the vodcasts for COM2025 do indeed aid in a rise to global consciousness, driving students to think of local as well as global impacts – in this case – on Organisational Communication, whilst offering images of aspects that students would otherwise mostly not come into contact with. This influence is thus fulfilled by the COM2025 vodcasts.

Disembeddedness in single locations

The last influence of globalisation on communication relates the two previously discussed influences to one another with the sharing of knowledge being restructured “across time and space”, none of the physical locations that the participating individuals find themselves in can be deemed as important, as

none are significant. Resultantly, and drawing from the first influence discussed, the physical locations that the respective individuals find themselves in become obsolete, as a new location or space is created – albeit not a physical space – a space existing through interaction via new media communication technology.

In the case of the COM2025 vodcasts, this means that physical lecture halls, classrooms and the like become obsolete, as the vodcasts themselves become the new lecture space – the new classroom. This aspect is fulfilled here, as there is no need for physical lecture halls or classrooms on a campus of Unisa for students to interact with the lessons given by the vodcasts as they themselves create this space, each and every time it is accessed and played.

From the above discussions it can be deduced that the COM2025 vodcasts fulfil most of the requirements set in literature for new communication technologies, in terms of the three notable influences of globalisation. In the first instance it is seen that the vodcasts do indeed hold the capacity to aid in time and space compression although the aspect of true reciprocal communications is not satisfied (the only element that does not completely comply). Secondly, rise to global consciousness and reflexivity is aided by means of local and global knowledge whilst, thirdly, disembeddedness in single locations is seen where a physical (brick and mortar) classroom becomes obsolete, as the vodcasts themselves create a virtual “classroom” each time it is accessed.

The COM2025 vodcasts are thus capable of imparting the three notable influences of globalisation on the students that access them, and are thus able to bridge the relevant distances created by an ODL environment. This inference is, however, only theoretical at this stage. In order to further this topic, empirical testing is needed, where students should be asked whether or not they **perceive** these distances to have been bridged in this way. It was for this purpose that the quantitative research was undertaken.

Quantitative research findings

As said above, the quantitative research for this article was employed to research the perceptions of students regarding the influences of the COM2025 vodcasts, and its ability to aid in the bridging of distances created by the ODL nature of Unisa. For this, a questionnaire survey was employed with closed ended questions and items tested by means of a Likert scale. In order to test the reliability of the questions asked, the Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for the groups of items dealing with each influence was calculated. This method is described as a coefficient of reliability, as it measures how well a set of

questions measure a single variable. This measurement ranges between 0 and 1. If the question tested has a score close to 0.7 or higher, the measurement of that question is valid (UCLA 2006; Roberts, Priest and Taynor 2006, 44; Santos 1999, 7).

The entire questionnaire yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.867 for the 15 items – well above the 0.7 reliability indicator. The three separate groups of items were also tested and for the items dealing with time and space compression, the lowest Cronbach's alpha of 0.695 (for four items) was found. Although low, this it is still within the scope of reliability. For the other two groups, however, high reliability was found as the global consciousness and reflexivity items scored 0.821 (for four items) whilst the items dealing with disembeddedness in single locations yielded a 0.818 coefficient (for four items).

Having found all to be reliable, the overall impression of the vodcasts as medium for teaching can first be understood. As this was not the focus of the research, but only for contextualisation purposes, only three general questions were asked in this vein. Firstly, students were asked whether or not they found the vodcasts useful in their studies in the module Organisational Communication. 96.7% ($N=30$) of students who accessed and used the vodcasts found it useful in the general sense. Thereafter, students were asked to what extent they found it useful as an initial learning tool, and to what extent a tool for revision purposes. As can be seen in table 1 and table 2 below, most students found it more helpful as an initial learning tool as a tool for revision purposes. This means that students are prone to see vodcasts as a tool used for understanding the content of the module, rather than one used to revise work.

> **Insert table 1 here** <

> **Insert table 2 here** <

Even so, it can be seen in the tables above that most respondents to the questionnaire found the vodcasts useful in their studies. Next students were asked about its usefulness in terms of its influence on bridging the gaps of an ODL environment. Students were, however, not made aware of the fact that they were responding to this overall question as the items tested the statements of literature in terms of the three notable influences. The findings under each can now be discussed.

Compression of time and space

In terms of time and space compression, students as respondents were asked four different questions, derived from the central theoretical statements of this influence. Firstly respondents were asked whether

or not they find the statement true that *the vodcasts allow them access to lecturers, even when they are away from the university*. As can be seen in table 3 below, a split response to this statement was found as a cumulative 43.3% ($n=13$) of students thought this to be so, whilst 46.6% ($n=14$) did not perceive this to be the case.

> Insert table 3 here <

When weighed against the qualitative findings above, this kind of response is anticipated, as the tutorials do offer the students interaction with the lecturers of this module, but that this interaction is one-sided (from the lecturer) and students do not have the opportunity to interact or respond. This is to say that the *access to the lecturers* is not a complete one, as students do not have the opportunity to interact with lecturers in the same manner as if they were physically present.

Closely related to this, next respondents were asked to what extent they felt that *the lecturer and they are in the same place when they access the vodcasts*. Herein 90% ($n=27$) of respondents felt that this is indeed true (as seen in table 4). The same sort of response was seen (as in table 5) when respondents were asked whether or not *it feels like the lecturer is lecturing them at home when they watch the vodcasts*. Again 90% ($n=27$) of respondents felt that this is indeed the case. It can thus be derived that most respondents feel that the vodcasts offer them the same kind of classroom interaction – in this sense – as if they were physically lectured in a contact situation, but that this is not a substitute for being able to interact with the lecturer themselves.

> Insert table 4 here <

> Insert table 5 here <

Having addressed the *space* dimension of this influence, respondents were then asked about the *time* dimension by responding to what degree they felt that *they are able to view the electronic tutorials at any time that they wish – not having to abide by the University's operating hours*.

An overwhelming 96.7% ($n= 29$) of students felt that this is indeed the case. An aspect that could account for the 3.3% less positive response in this case is that some students do not have access to a computer at home, and thus have to view the vodcasts either another place of business (e.g. an internet café) or at one of Unisa's satellite campuses. In this case, the operating hours will be something that the student will

have to adhere to. Nevertheless, the greater majority of students felt that the obstacle of time is indeed bridged by this medium.

> **Insert table 6 here** <

Global consciousness and reflexivity

For global consciousness and reflexivity, respondents were asked to what extent the *vodcasts provided them with knowledge from distant locations, for example Communication knowledge generated in other countries*. For this, 33.3% of respondents felt positively about this statement, 13.3% felt that it is not at all the case, whilst 53.3% ($N=30$) of students felt that this statement is *sometimes* but not always the case (see table 7). Most respondents (43.4% where $n=13$) also felt that the vodcasts do not truly make them feel connected to the global communication context, as is seen in table 8 below.

> **Insert table 7 here** <

> **Insert table 8 here** <

This can be as a result of the fact that the majority of students (66.7% n being 20) did not perceive the vodcasts to *have shown them images from distant locations, for example pictures from other parts of the world that they have never seen* (table 9). Still, 83.3% ($n=25$) of students felt that as a result of the vodcasts they *now think of global communication content as something that they need to implement locally* (table 10).

> **Insert table 9 here** <

> **Insert table 10 here** <

It can therefore be deduced that students do not feel that global consciousness is entirely fulfilled by the vodcasts in this module, but that they did indeed feel that the aspect of reflexivity (reflecting the global aspects to the local sphere) is indeed something that was accomplished. This could be due to the fact that the vodcasts offer various examples citing South African (local) applications to international theories, and not vice versa.

Disembeddedness in single locations

Linking the previous two influences to one another, the last influence, which deals with disembeddedness in single locations, was yet again tested quantitatively by means of four items. The first item asks students to what extent they feel that when they *access the vodcasts, they feel like they do not have to be at the University to be lectured*. A great majority – 86.7% of students – felt that this is indeed the case, that they need not physically be at the University to be lectured.

> Insert table 11 here <

In much the same vein, the next to items respectively asks if students feel that the *vodcasts makes them feel as if they are in their own classroom – that there need not be a classroom at the University to visit* and whether or not they feel that the vodcasts *create a classroom whenever they are accessing it*. 86.6% ($n=26$) of respondents felt that there need not be a classroom at the University to visit as 90% ($n=27$) felt that the vodcasts create a classroom whenever they access it.

> Insert table 12 here <

> Insert table 13 here <

Lastly students were asked whether or not they feel that *if they can access all their study material this way (through vodcasts), that they will not need to visit the University*. Most respondents, 60% ($n=18$), felt that this is not the case. This can be attributed to the fact that students have interactions with the University and lecturers for various other reasons, apart from being lectured and understanding the contents of study materials. As is seen here, and in table 14 below, this means that vodcasts cannot (on its own) answer to all the aspects of disembeddedness in single locations.

> Insert table 14 here <

To summarise this, and the other influences' application to vodcasts and the ODL environment of Unisa, the next section will conclude and review the findings as above.

CONCLUSION

In terms of the qualitative findings of this research, it can be said that the vodcasts for the module COM2025 are indeed – theoretically – capable of impressing the influences of globalisation as suggested

by Monge and Matei (2004), Monge (1999); (1998), Monge et al (1998) and Monge and Kalman (1996), with a deviation under the influence of *compression in time and space* where students are not able to interact and communicate with lecturers, the University and other students in a two-way reciprocal manner through this medium.

Apart from this, however, the qualitative findings suggested that the vodcasts are able to compress time and space constraints, offer global consciousness and reflexivity whilst offering the opportunity of disembeddedness in a single, physical location. Qualitatively it was thus found that vodcasts are able to bridge the ODL distances of time and space separation between the University and its students partially, whilst offering knowledge from locations that the student (as an ODL student) might not otherwise be exposed to, along with the fact that the University and its students do not have to be in one physical space (a brick and mortar building) in order to do this.

Taking the theoretical possibility to students, and quantitatively researching their perceptions about vodcasts' ability to bridge these distances, much the same was found for time and space compression, where students' perceptions were that; although they feel like the lecturer and they are in the same place at the same time, and that the lecturer is lecturing them at home when they access the vodcasts, this does not substitute the need for reciprocal interaction with the lecturer.

For global consciousness and reflexivity, on the other hand, students mostly felt that global consciousness is not something that the vodcasts address, although they do feel more reflexive about the application of global knowledge to local contexts as a result of it. This could be a product of the contents of the vodcasts themselves – and not the medium in which it was conveyed, however, as it is stated under the findings that the vodcasts offer examples citing South African (local) applications to international theories, and not vice versa.

More positively, however, under disembeddedness in single locations, students felt that they need not visit a classroom at the University to be lectured when vodcasts are used, as the vodcasts creates a classroom (albeit not a physical one) whenever they are accessed. Having said this, students felt that the 'single (physical) location' of the University cannot be completely abolished with the use of just vodcasts, as there will still be a need to visit the University for other reasons, other than being lectured.

From the above it is thus clear that vodcasts as a medium is able to, and is perceived to bridge many of the plaguing distances inherently part of an ODL environment – for example teaching and imparting knowledge at a distance. Having said this, vodcasts do not offer a complete solution (as is expected) as there is no substitute for physical interactions in this sense (for example for reciprocal interactions). Summaritively it can thus be said that vodcasts can be used as a tool in bridging some of the distances in an ODL environment as students perceived it to have helped in this matter – although not completely have solved problems herein as is suggested by literature to be possible.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In lieu of the above, it is thus firstly recommended that vodcasts be used as a teaching tool in the ODL environment, as it was theoretically and empirically found to be a tool of use when an educator is faced with bridging teaching distances inherent to ODL – one of the greatest being lecturing content at a distance. Mindful of the three notable influences of globalisation, however, it is secondly recommended that not only global knowledge be made applicable to local applications, but that local knowledge be demonstrated in terms of global applications also. Thirdly, in conjunction with the vodcasts, a platform should be created where students are encouraged to interact with one another as well as the lecturer about the vodcasts and its contents, in order to create reciprocal interactions, which are expressed as a need in this instance. Fourthly and closely related to the third recommendation it is also recommended that the vodcasts be used alongside other new communication technologies as, as an isolated medium, it is not able to fully address all aspects implied by the three notable influences of globalisation to be possible. Finally, and for future studies it is recommended that this study – looking at the notable influences of globalisation – be repeated, including all other new communications technologies available to students that were omitted from this article in terms of the focus thereof (for example *myUNISA* with all of its applications and possibilities, as well as the Unisa website with its own possibilities and applications).

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